

Core Concepts

Division of Juvenile Corrections

Moving Forward Together

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Which juvenile correctional practices are effective? (And how do we know?)

Evidence-based practices (EBP) are those practices which have been proven through scientific research to consistently produce specific, intended results. There are many evidence-based programs and practices shown to be effective at improving juvenile outcomes.

The National Institute of Corrections identified eight key principles for effective practice across the criminal justice system (see picture at right). Each of these principles is supported by multiple studies on offender rehabilitation and behavior change from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s (<http://nicic.gov/ThePrinciplesofEffectiveInterventions>).

Therapeutic interventions are found to be most effective at reducing juvenile recidivism. There are several “brand name” treatment programs, as well as “generic” programs and practices that are effective in working with youth in the juvenile justice system (<http://forumfyi.org/files/ImprovingEffectivenessofJuvenileJusticePrograms.pdf>).



Here are a few of the programs and practices in place in DJC and the evidence supporting them.

Trauma-Informed Care

A number of studies have documented the negative effects that childhood trauma has on many youth in the juvenile justice system and the importance of creating a “trauma-informed” culture and approach in juvenile corrections (http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/jj_trauma_brief_environmentofcare_burrell_final.pdf; <http://www.nctsn.com/resources/topics/juvenile-justice-system>). To improve our effectiveness in working with youth who have experienced trauma, DJC is incorporating trauma-informed practices into daily operations at LHS and CLS, including the use of coping strategies, sensory tools, and the Critical Thinking Room in the Dubois Living Unit.

Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions

Cognitive-behavioral interventions are based on the idea that a person’s thoughts influence his or her behavior, and a person can change his or her own thoughts. This type of intervention teaches the individual how to recognize distorted or unrealistic thoughts, values, beliefs, and attitudes and restructure his or her thinking to create positive behavior change. Several studies, including a comprehensive analysis of 548 evaluations of various delinquency interventions (<http://forumfyi.org/files/ImprovingEffectivenessofJuvenileJusticePrograms.pdf>), have proven that cognitive-behavioral interventions are effective for reducing juvenile recidivism. (<http://nij.gov/journals/265/Pages/what-is-cbt.aspx>). LHS and CLS offer cognitive-behavioral programs, including ART and JCIP.

Positive Reinforcement

Evidence indicates that positive reinforcement is more effective than punishment at creating and sustaining behavior change. Research suggests that providing four positives (verbal praise, rewards, incentives) for every one negative (punishment, sanction) is most effective for promoting behavior change (<http://nicic.gov/ThePrinciplesofEffectiveInterventions>). DJC is incorporating this practice through the “4:1” initiative at LHS and CLS and through changes in community supervision practices.

Which juvenile correctional practices are NOT effective? (And how do we know?)

Just as some studies show certain programs to be effective at changing youth behavior and decreasing recidivism, other studies show us what *doesn't* work, despite the best of intentions. Research shows that approaches that focus on deterrence, discipline, or punishment generally have no impact on recidivism and some may increase recidivism (<http://forumfyi.org/files/ImprovingEffectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs.pdf>).

Examples these programs and practices include:

- Scared Straight-type programs
- Boot camps
- D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education)
- Intensive supervision/detention without treatment

Why is EBP important in juvenile justice?

When correctional staff use evidence-based practices in their interactions with youth—during school, activities of daily living, treatment groups, even in passing conversation—we promote:

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| Increased public safety | Minimized risk of reoffending (recidivism) |
| Improved school performance | Constructive behavior change |
| Reduced drug use | Personal development |
| Improved family relations | Effectiveness in juvenile corrections programming |

How does EBP affect me?

Understanding and using evidence-based practices is important to each position in DJC. We all share a common interest in helping kids lead better lives when they leave our care, and EBP will help us achieve that goal. Regardless of your job title, where you work, or years of experience, all staff must be invested and stay informed about how to use evidence-based practices in their interactions with youth. Over the course of the next month, talk with your supervisor about how EBP impacts your work and how you can learn more.

Additional Resources

Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development. University of Colorado Boulder, Institute of Behavioral Science, Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. <http://www.blueprintsprograms.com/>

Evidence-Based Practices in the Criminal Justice System: Annotated Bibliography. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections. <http://nicic.gov/Library/026917>

Model Programs Guide. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. <http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/>

For more information...

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